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ABSTRACT

Diverse explanations have been offered for the complex problems facing inner-city families. This paper considers how policies designed to solve urban problems can benefit from research conducted to examine elements from three prominent arguments: (1) family behavior contributes to urban problems; (2) structural changes in the U.S. economy have altered the opportunity structure for individuals in cities and, consequently, their family behavior; and (3) changes in national values have contributed to changes in family behavior and increases in undesirable social behavior. These arguments are evaluated using results from empirical studies. Researchers are providing mounting evidence of some causal influence of family structure on positive academic outcomes through income, stress, and parental supervision, but there is also reason to believe that family structure does not fully explain positive outcomes. Despite the merits of the structural-change argument, it is too simplistic to treat what is apparently dysfunctional behavior as simply the response to a lack of jobs. Nor is it sufficient merely to focus on the values of inner-city residents. Approaches to strengthening the family must be supported by social and educational initiatives to reduce poverty. Seven figures illustrate the discussion. (Contains 86 references.) (SLD)

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Urban Families and Urban Problems: Review of the Literature

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Urban Families and Urban Problems: Review of the Literature

Introduction

Many neighborhoods in our nation's urban areas are plagued by serious problems: high rates of violent crime, poverty, children raised in mother-only families, unemployment, poor access to health care, homelessness, drug dependency, racial tension, gang violence, drug dealing, and a sense of overall alienation. The riots in Los Angeles earlier this year riveted the nation and brought renewed attention to our central cities and the families that make their homes there.

The problems facing inner city families are complex, and diverse explanations for them have been offered by scholars, policy-makers, and the media. The purpose of this paper is to consider how policies designed to solve urban problems can benefit from research conducted to examine elements from three prominent arguments:

> ***Family behavior contributes to urban problems.*** Proponents of this argument blame teenage childbearing, the decline in marriage and the rise in nonmarital childbearing and divorce for many of the ills of central cities. From this perspective, the failure to form strong families contributes to problems such as drug dependency and crime, and to declines in social organization and productivity in our cities.
>
> ***Structural changes in the U.S. economy have altered the opportunity structure of individuals living in our cities and consequently their family behavior.*** Decreases in the availability of manufacturing jobs in central cities and the out-migration of middle class blacks to the suburbs, have eliminated many opportunities that formerly existed in urban areas. With inadequate job prospects, and the lack of good role models, the standard of living in some central cities has declined dramatically. These new realities have not only affected the standard of living in inner cities, but also the choices that people who live there make about marriage and childbearing.
>
> ***Changes in values in the nation as a whole, such as increased consumerism and individualism, have contributed both to changes in family behavior and to increases in undesirable social behavior.*** Proponents of this perspective maintain that we live in an increasingly "individualistic" society. Increases in divorce, crime, idleness, homelessness, and chemical dependency in the inner city are reflections of the

greater importance being placed on the fulfillment of personal goals at the expense of societal ones, just as white-collar crime, increased tolerance for extramarital affairs, etc. are reflections of this same cultural shift in the larger society.

In the remainder of the paper we present the three arguments more fully and evaluate their merits using results from empirical studies. In the final section we synthesize the evidence and discuss the directions that policy must take if it is to be successful.

Family Behavior

Mother-headed families, the diminished involvement of fathers in the upbringing and support of their children, and births outside of marriage and to teens are practically the norm in some city neighborhoods. These realities have prompted many to assume that the choices that inner city residents make related to marriage and childrearing are to blame for the serious social problems that affect the quality of life throughout urban areas and the nation. But, does *family behavior* explain the ills of inner cities? And, more importantly, will changing family behavior solve the many problems associated with inner city life?

To answer these questions, one must begin with the fact that family life in urban America has changed dramatically in the last several decades. Marriage rates have plummeted, out-of-wedlock childbearing is common, and divorce rates are high. Family patterns in the center of the nation's largest cities differ dramatically from those in the suburbs. As shown in Figure 1 for metropolitan areas with one million or more

residents, 61 percent of children in the central city live with two parents as compared to 79 percent of those outside the center. These figures include children who live with a birth parent and a step-parent and those living with two adoptive parents. The proportion living with never-married mothers is more than three times larger within the central city (18 percent) versus the suburbs (5 percent). Outside of metropolitan areas (not shown), 77 percent of children live in two-parent families, 14 percent live in separated or divorced families, and 5 percent live in never-married families.

When these same data are broken down by racial/ethnic group, dramatic differences in the proportion of children living in single-parent families are revealed (Figures 2 through 4). Only 32 percent of black children in the nation's largest central cities were living with two parents in 1991, compared to 64 percent of Hispanic, and 81 percent of white children. Greater proportions of minority children in these inner cities live with never-married mothers as well -- 41 percent of blacks, 13 percent of Hispanics, and 4 percent of whites. Differences in the proportions living with separated or divorced mothers are not as great across the racial/ethnic groups. Roughly one-fifth of minority children and one-tenth of white children in central cities of one million or more residents live with mothers who are separated or divorced.

While the fact that two-parent families are less common is undeniable, is there a link between family structure and the types of problems plaguing our inner cities? To answer this question, in the next several pages the evidence about the link between family structure and the well-being of children, adults, and society will be reviewed.

Family Structure and Children's Well-Being

The available evidence makes it clear that there is a link between the family situation in which children are raised and their well-being in childhood, as well as their life chances as adults. Across multiple dimensions of well-being, including physical health, cognitive functioning, personal adjustment and self-esteem, and antisocial behavior and self-control, research findings suggest that children whose parents are divorced or never-married are disproportionately at risk of physical, psychological, and social difficulties.

One study by Zill and Schoenborn (1990), using a nationally representative sample of more than 17,000 children nationwide, documented that children in disrupted families had elevated levels of emotional and behavioral problems. Children who were not living with both biological parents were more than twice as likely as those in mother-father families to have had a delay in growth or development, a learning disability, or an emotional problem that lasted three months or more, or required psychological help. Moreover, a greater percentage of children in single- and step-parent families had trouble in school. More than half of the children aged 7 to 17 in mother-only families were reported at the bottom half of their class compared to 38 percent of those in mother-father families. Children in disrupted families were also twice as likely as those in mother-father families to be suspended or expelled.

Youth who have grown up in single-parent families are also less likely to graduate from high school, more likely to form unstable marital unions themselves, and are more likely to be employed in low-wage jobs than their counterparts who grow up with both

biological parents (e.g., Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Corcoran et al., 1987; Hill et al. 1987). These studies have shown that negative effects of being raised by a single parent and experiencing a disruption during childhood persist even after controlling for family income and other socioeconomic characteristics. However, at least two other studies have found that the effects of being raised in a single-parent family may be more severe for white than for minority children.

Using longitudinal data from a national survey of youth, Haurin (1992) analyzed the types of parental living arrangements children experienced from birth to age 14. She found that for whites, the longer time spent with two parents, the higher the probability of completing high school, the lower the likelihood of marijuana use as a teenager, and the lower the likelihood of becoming a teen parent, even after controlling for measures of family socioeconomic status and maternal employment. However, among black and Hispanic youth there was no significant difference between two-parent and other family situations on most of the same outcomes. The one important exception was for black youth who were found to be more likely to participate in serious illegal activity if they had resided in a single-parent home.

Myers and his colleagues (1987) also found that being in a mother-headed family had a greater effect on the academic outcomes of whites. These researchers used data from a national sample of high school sophomores in 1980 and examined the effects of being in a single-parent family and of having an employed mother on high school performance of white and black youth. Myers et al. found that white students from single-parent families had higher levels of misbehavior, lower achievement scores, and

lower grades than their counterparts from two-parent families. However, among black students there were very few significant effects of being from a single-parent family. An important variable, regardless of race, was maternal employment. These researchers found that students of employed mothers had somewhat higher levels of misbehavior, lower achievement scores and grades, and lower educational attainment expectations than those whose mothers did not work when they were in high school.

It is important to note that not every child who experiences marital disruption or is raised in a single-parent family is scarred for life, just as not every child in a two-parent family becomes a productive adult. Sometimes divorce brings an abusive or highly conflictual relationship to an end, and some children improve in the aftermath of disruption (e.g., Hetherington, 1989). In addition, some researchers have noted that children in disrupted families often exhibit greater levels of maturity (Demo and Acock, 1988). Studies have also revealed that persistent high levels of conflict between parents in an *intact* family can damage children's emotional health and school progress (Peterson and Zill, 1986). Moreover, using prospective data, researchers have shown that some of the apparent effect of divorce can be attributed to problems that existed in families even before disruption occurred (Block et al. 1986; Cherlin et al., 1991).

Further evidence that the presence of two parents is not a fool-proof formula for success can be found in the case of remarriage after divorce. While remarriage generally eases the economic burden of divorce for custodial mothers, the addition of a step-parent has ambiguous implications for her children. Using data from a national survey of youth, Zill and colleagues (1992) found that those whose mothers had remarried had

poor relationships with their mothers. Similarly, a national survey of 1738 parents, sponsored by the National Commission on Children (1991), also revealed that even parents in remarriages which they rated as "happy" (54 percent) were less likely than those in one-parent families (64 percent) to have "an excellent relationship with their children." The contrast is more dramatic when the remarriage is rated as "unhappy"; only 33 percent of such parents feel they have an excellent relationship with their children.

In addition to the family circumstances in which children are raised, the marital decisions that they make for themselves are also important. Many young people who engage in rebellious or delinquent activities as adolescents or young adults grow out of these behavior patterns as they age (Robins, 1978; Cline, 1980; Gove, 1985). Research has shown that this "settling down" process is facilitated when youth become involved in rewarding careers, stable love relationships, or responsible parenthood (Sampson and Laub, 1990). The stabilizing influence of family attachments is foregone, however, if the young person does not get married, or reduced if the marriage is an unhappy or short-lived one (Sampson and Laub, 1992). We do not yet know whether unmarried cohabitation has beneficial effects on young adult behavior similar to those of legal marriage, but initial evidence suggests that in America these relationships are fragile and distinct from legal marriage (Bumpass and Sweet, 1989).

Family Structure and Adult Well-being

Family structure is also important for adults. Popenoe, a social historian, maintains that one of the principle functions of families in modern societies is to provide "psychological anchorage" for adults (Popenoe, 1988). He argues that "adults in modern societies look to the family to fulfill the need for stable and reliable emotional relationships that affirm their feelings of self-worth and provide a sense of identity and belonging" (Popenoe, 1988). Whether due to the emotional support it provides for adults, or other factors, the available evidence indicates that marriage enhances the well-being of adults across multiple dimensions.

In the psychological and physical health domains, married adults rate higher on measures of life satisfaction than their never-married and divorced counterparts. In addition, National Health Interview Survey data, age-adjusted to control for age differences in marital status groups, show that married individuals are the least likely of any marital status group to report being in fair or poor health (11 % of men and 12% of women). Poor health was most prevalent among widowed men (18 percent) and among separated or divorced, and widowed women (18% and 19%, respectively).

There are also additional health benefits to being married in terms of acute conditions, injuries and accidents, restricted activity days, and health care utilization. Married adults have more favorable outcomes on most of these indicators. Other studies have also provided evidence of a "marriage benefit" with respect to the diagnosis, treatment, and survival of illness. Goodwin, et. al. (1987), who examined the effects of marital status on stage, treatment, and survival of cancer patients, argued that the

positive effects they see from marital status are due, at least in part, to the social support provided by a spouse, which they believe provides a buffer to stressful events that might affect health. However, they did not examine marital quality nor other types of social support that are available to those who are single, which might elicit effects similar to those of marriage.

Marriage is also associated with favorable labor market outcomes for adults. Economists have shown that married males have higher wages, productivity, and rates of employment. The wage-rate advantage of marriage holds even when differences in educational attainment, work experience, and race are controlled (Kenny, 1983; Kenny et al., 1979; Olson, et al., 1979). At least one study, based on a nationally representative cohort of young men who were ages 22 to 29 in 1987, found that men who take on the responsibilities of fatherhood work more hours and have higher wages than men who have no children or who father children, but do not live with them (Lerman, 1990). This study also found that marriage was a stronger determinant of earnings and employment than fatherhood: married fathers living with their children earned less than their childless counterparts. The study could not distinguish which of several possible explanations accounted for the results, however. It may be that marrying and becoming a father encourages men to become more mature and responsible. Alternatively, men who have such positive traits may be more likely to marry and become fathers, or may be more attractive marriage partners. A third possibility is that external factors, such as job market opportunities, enable men with education and labor market skills to both

marry and to earn more, but prevent their less educated or poorly skilled counterparts from doing the same.

Family Structure and Community Well-Being

Although less work has been done to examine the links between family structure and the well-being of the larger society, studies have shown that there are cumulative benefits to the community when it is comprised of a large share of married-couple families. Family dissolution has been linked with community violence, and marital attachment has been shown to reduce adult crime. Using data from the British Crime Survey, Sampson and Groves (1989) found that community-level family structure affects crime victimization. Measured as the percent of divorced/separated adults and the percent of households with single parents with children, these researchers found that community-level family structure has a significant effect on the presence of unsupervised peer groups, which in turn significantly affects crime victimization, including mugging/street robbery, stranger violence, and the overall victimization rate. They also found that the proportion of single-parent families had a direct effect, net of the effect of unsupervised peer groups, on stranger violence (e.g., assault, rape) and overall victimization. Family structure was also found to have an effect on violent offending in this study, but almost all of the effect (97%) was due to the effects of unsupervised peer groups.

Others have hypothesized that the presence of single-parent families affects the level of community social control. Messner and Sampson (1991) found that the percent

single-parent families (including never-married and those formed by marital dissolution) in neighborhoods has a significant effect on crime victimization (murder and robbery), net of other factors. They found the sex ratio (number of males per 100 females) to be the strongest predictor of female-headed households, net of other demographic characteristics, and concluded that the sex ratio contributes to violent crime via its effect on family formation and disruption. That is, the fewer the males in a community, the higher the rate of female-headed families, and thus, violent crime.

Mechanisms for the Family Structure Effect

In the foregoing discussion we have provided evidence that family structure matters to the well-being of children, adults, and society, however the *reasons* for its effects are far less clear. Most social scientists agree that marital status alone is not what is important to the well-being of adults and children, but rather the complex set of characteristics, behaviors, and circumstances that usually accompany a person's marital status. It is these factors, or what researchers term the "mechanisms of the effect", that need to be well understood for public policy directed at family behavior to be effective. Consider the following example. If being raised in a single-parent household increases the likelihood that a youth will drop out of high school, net of the influence of other measurable factors such as low income, parental involvement and the like, one would direct policy at encouraging marriage. However, if some other variable, such as the school quality or the neighborhoods in which single-parents tend to reside were the true cause of dropping out, then changing the mother's marital status would not make any

difference, unless it were accompanied by a move to a better neighborhood or better schools.

Although available research is far more instructive about the outcomes associated with family patterns than about processes, a number of important mechanisms have been identified.

Economic and social well-being

A key attribute of mother-headed families is poverty. Single-parent families with children are six times more likely to be poor than their married-couple counterparts (Zill, 1992). There are several factors that contribute to the high incidence of poverty among mother-headed families. First, the wages of the household head typically determine the family's economic status and because women tend to earn lower wages and to work fewer hours, female household heads tend to be at a disadvantage. Second, while child support is an important potential source of income for mother-headed families, it is absent in the majority of cases. National level data provide striking evidence, that a large proportion of non-residential fathers make no financial contributions to their children's up-bringing (Peterson and Nord, 1990).

Using data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation, Bianchi and McArthur (1991) found that children whose fathers departed from the household experienced a 23 percent drop in family income. While the decline was lower when they took account of family size after the father's departure (8 percent), these reductions were in contrast to real income improvements of about 8 percent for children living in

stable, two-parent families. Bane (1986) used data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, a longitudinal study of 5,000 households, however, and found that more than 60 percent of black women who were poor after entering a female-headed family were already poor. Regardless of whether the transition to a single-parent family *causes* poverty, however, the evidence is clear that living in a female-headed family makes it more difficult to overcome poverty.

Because poverty, especially if it endures for a substantial portion of childhood, has significant implications for children's physical health, success in school, and conduct and behavior (McLoyd, 1991, Zill et al., 1991), this is an area where public policy should place particular emphasis. Programs that facilitate the payment of child support, as well as work training and education programs designed to improve the labor force returns and work attachment of single mothers, would attenuate the effect of single-parenthood on child well-being through their influence on reducing poverty.

Supervision/Socialization Process

Another explanation for the difficulties experienced by children raised in single-parent families is that there is only one parent in the household to supervise them. Evidence from a study of black teens in Chicago also suggests that parental supervision is an important determinant of sexual activity and pregnancy. Hogan and Kitagawa (1985) found that teens who did not date were less likely to be sexually active and to become pregnant, compared to teens who dated. Hogan and Kitagawa also showed that girls whose parents closely supervised their dating activities were half as likely to become

pregnant as teenagers, compared to those whose early dating behavior was not closely supervised. These researchers believe that "parents can decrease, but not eliminate the chance that their daughter will become sexually active and pregnant by being strict about the boys she dates, where she goes, and when she returns home."

In addition, some have argued that the *quality* of parenting differs in single-parent families. The quality of parent-child interaction is critical to a child's healthy development. Factors such as the mother's level of education, and her cognitive attainment have been linked to different parenting styles (Baumrind, 1971) and some researchers have shown that the nature and quality of the home environment that is provided to children is affected by environmental factors as well (Menaghan and Parcel, 1991; Desai et al., 1991). Using the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME) scale developed by Bradley and Caldwell (1984), Zill et al. (1991) report lower scores for families falling below the poverty line and who are welfare dependent. Furthermore, Menaghan and Parcel (1991) found that the nature of parents' occupational experiences, and changing family circumstances such as those brought about by marital disruption, may reduce the amount of stimulation and nurturance that parents are able to provide. Research to date has not revealed consistent differences between the parenting behavior of teen and older mothers net of socioeconomic status (Elster et al., 1983; Roosa and Vaughn, 1984; Field et al., 1985), however, the quality of the child's home environment has been linked to many of the factors, such as low education, that are associated with teenage childbearing.

Given the importance of an emotionally warm and cognitively stimulating home environment as a potential mechanisms of the effects of single- and early parenthood, programmatic intervention along these lines are promising avenues for public policy. At least one program, Project Redirection, has already had success in this regard.

Project Redirection was directed toward teenagers who were 17 or younger, lacking a high school diploma or equivalency degree, or who were eligible for or were recipients of AFDC. It was designed to offer a comprehensive package of services including educational, job-related, parenting, and life-management skills, and to encourage parents to delay further childbearing. After five years, a follow-up interview was conducted to assess the mother's parenting behavior and the development of one of her children, usually her first child who was then on average almost six years old. The mothers' parenting skills were assessed using the HOME scale. Project Redirection families scored higher than comparison families on the HOME scale. Moreover, their children obtained higher receptive vocabulary scores on average than the children in the comparison group (Polit et al., 1988). These results suggest that mothers can be helped to provide more enriching environments to their young children.

Social Support

Another important asset linked to family structure is the social support from kin networks and the community. Some argue that a single mother has less access to social support (due to the lack of a spouse), and is less likely to live in a community with strong resources. However, studies that have examined differences in social support by

family structure have yielded mixed results. Some researchers find that single mothers are not isolated at all from their friends or relatives (e.g., Alwin, Converse, and Martin, 1985). These same researchers also find, however, that never-married mothers and divorced mothers tend to have less contact with their neighbors than married mothers. This may be due to the increased residential mobility of single-mothers rather than to social support.

Other researchers argue that it is not the quantity, but rather the quality, of social contacts that is important. While kin networks may be strong in material support, relatives often interfere in their attempts to affect the mothers' parenting; some studies find family members to be even more interfering for single mothers. Milardo (1987) argues that although friendship networks provide more emotional support than kin networks for single mothers, their support tends to be outweighed by the interference of relatives. On the other hand, Baldwin and Cain (1980) report better outcomes for teen mothers if an adult, such as the grandmother, provides her with help.

Another area where public policy can be effective, consequently, is through the provision of material and nonmaterial support to mother-headed families. Such support might be provided through community programs such as baby-sitting cooperatives or through programs by which mothers can earn needed help with tasks for which they are ill-equipped (such as yard work, household repairs) in exchange for providing services to others, such as shopping or other errands.

Selectivity

While many have documented the benefits of marriage to individuals and society, it is important to be mindful that most studies to date (because of limitations in data and methods) have not adequately addressed the issue of selectivity into marriage or parenthood. That is, because people *choose* their marital status rather than get randomly sorted into marriage or singlehood, it is difficult to disentangle the effects of having personal qualities that correlate with the propensity to marry from the effect of marriage per se. Most researchers agree that in addition to the measurable ways in which those who choose marriage differ from those who cohabit or remain single (such as level of education, marital status of their own parents, and income), there are likely many intangible factors that set these individuals apart as well. They may, for example, place a different value on community norms which would also explain their greater attachment to the workforce and lower rates of crime. The same is true for marital dissolution. Couples who divorce are more likely to be less well educated, to be younger at the time of marriage, to have younger ages at first birth, and to have difficulties, such as alcoholism and infidelity in comparison to those who remain in stable marriages (White, 1990). Thus, part of the explanation for the negative outcomes associated with marital disruption for children may be due to characteristics of the child's parents even before the disruption.

The important point is that marriage, per se, is not necessarily the issue, but rather the positive attributes that married adults often bring to parenthood and to their communities. Moreover, attempts to legislate people's private behavior often have met

with failure. Public policies can play a role in promoting programs that strengthen families, however. For example, parents need to be educated about the consequences that their marital decisions have for their children, young people need to understand the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood, and disadvantaged youth should be provided with alternatives so that they do not enter parenthood too soon.

Young people who do not succeed in school need options, such as apprenticeship or job-training programs. And, modifications to social programs must be scrutinized to ensure that they do not inadvertently encourage irresponsible parenthood.

Structural Conditions

The preceding section provided evidence that linked family structure with well-being at both the individual and community levels. However, because people live their lives within geographic, social, political, and economic contexts, one cannot understand family behavior within our nation's urban areas without considering the structural forces that operate in central cities and the impact they have on the quality of life for their residents.

Hispanics provide a good example of how "playing by the rules" is no guarantee of prosperity. Hispanics have followed more traditional patterns of marriage and child-rearing -- they marry, they work in the conventional labor force, they jointly try to raise children -- yet Hispanic parents face as bad or worse economic conditions as African American parents in the U.S. who have higher rates of birth outside of marriage, lower rates of marriage, and higher rates of marital dissolution (Zill, 1992). The poverty rate

for related Hispanic children under 18 has risen 28 percent in 1973 to 40 percent in 1991 (see Zill, 1992). Because Hispanics do not form single-parent families to the same extent as other minority groups part of the explanation for the type of poverty we see among central city residents, including Hispanics, must lie elsewhere.

The next section describes some of the structural forces that affect the nation's large cities. Because the research literature about changes in our cities is considerable, the discussion that follows will be limited to studies that have directly examined how structural factors have affected urban family life.

Economic Restructuring

Many of the nation's largest cities have experienced a shift from predominantly manufacturing to service-sector and information-processing industries, which has brought dramatic changes in the skill requirements and wage rates of the jobs that are being created relative to those that are disappearing. Jobs in the manufacturing sector have been among the highest paid for less-skilled blue collar workers (Holzer, 1989), and because cities historically have served as the centers of production and distribution of physical goods (McLanahan et al, 1988:120-121) the loss of these jobs is felt most keenly by central city residents. Since the late 1940s, manufacturing jobs are both declining in number as well as moving away from the cities to the suburbs and non-metropolitan areas (Kasarda, 1988:168). The phenomenon is particularly apparent in the older, industrial cities of the North. Between 1972 and 1982, Chicago lost 47 percent of its

traditional blue-collar jobs; Detroit, 41 percent; Philadelphia, 38 percent; and New York City, 30 percent (Kasarda, 1988:181).

Although some cities have been successful in attracting other industries to replace these departing manufacturing jobs, the job growth has been mostly among high-status service jobs in such areas as finance, business, insurance, law, advertising, and accounting (McGeary and Lynn, 1988:7). The problem for cities is that the jobs provided by the new growth industries require more and/or different skills, training, or education than the jobs which they replaced, and than the resident work force possesses (Kasarda, in McLanahan et al, 1988:120-121). This phenomenon, known as "spatial mismatch" (Kasarda, 1988:158), is made more severe in many Northern central cities because in addition to the loss of manufacturing jobs, these cities have also experienced large increases in their minority residents. The limited education of many of the new residents precludes their employment in new urban growth industries (Kasarda, 1988:177).

In a review of the empirical evidence for a spatial mismatch problem, Holzer (1989) concludes that spatial mismatch has had a significant effect on black unemployment. Specifically, he notes,

> "the decentralization of population and employment in metropolitan areas continues. Manufacturing employment, over 1/2 of which has already been suburbanized, has been declining in all areas, but especially in central cities" and that "blacks in central cities have less access to employment than do suburban blacks and whites, where access is measured by ratio of jobs to people within neighborhood, and by average travel time" (Holzer, 1989:22).

A strong labor market can reduce, but does not completely eliminate employment problems for minorities. For example, Boston underwent an economic transformation

similar to that described above, and its urban economy during the 1980s was experiencing a local labor market shortage. Nonetheless, Freeman (1991) found that a good labor market substantially improved the position of disadvantaged young men, particularly less-educated black youths, "despite their social pathologies and the 1980s twist in the American labor market that worked against those with fewer skills." Freeman argues that a good labor market is not a panacea for all the problems of the disadvantaged, but it does improve their employment and earnings" (Freeman, 1991:119).

In a study by Rosenbaum and Popkin (1991) female heads of households in the Gautreaux Program in Chicago provided an opportunity to examine whether moving low-income blacks to middle class neighborhoods would affect their labor force participation. Based essentially on random assignment, housing project residents were provided assistance to either relocate to another city residence, or to the suburbs. The study was designed to get test two competing hypotheses for the urban underclass. If the growth of the urban underclass were attributable to the out-migration of jobs to the suburbs, then moving low income blacks to the suburbs should produce employment gains. If, however, work disincentives in welfare programs and recipients' own lack of motivation were to blame for low labor force attachment, then suburban moves would have little effect on their employment. Rosenbaum and Popkin's results provide some support for both explanations. On the one hand, those women who moved to the suburbs had higher levels of labor market participation than those who remained in the city. However, the researchers also found that two non-structural variables -- having a low internal sense of control and being a long-term AFDC recipient -- reduced the

likelihood of employment. Although, a related variable, second-generation AFDC recipiency, had no effect.

Rosenbaum and Popkin (1991) also conducted in-depth interviews with a sample of the participants and found that the number of jobs in the suburbs was a major factor in the women's employment. Respondents also mentioned that other factors, such as greater feelings of safety (both for the mothers and their children) also affected their labor force participation. Mothers were afraid to leave their children alone in the housing projects for fear they would be hurt, or get involved in gang activities. Transportation, child care, lack of skills, and discrimination were also cited as important. This provides evidence for the importance of role models and social norms, and the lack thereof, in inner cities. Respondents stated that they believed that the suburbs, "..offered good role models and social norms that encourage work -- both absent in their city neighborhoods -- and they believe these factors have encouraged them to enter the labor force" (Rosenbaum and Popkin, 1991:352).

Concentration of Poverty

Researchers generally agree that there has been an increase in the concentration of poverty in the United States, (e.g Sawhill, 1988; Massey, 1990), but there is some disagreement about its cause.

Out-migration of the black middle class. Wilson (1987) attributes the increased concentration of poverty in the nation's largest cities to the out-migration of prosperous black families to the suburbs. According to William Julius Wilson,

> "...there are growing concentrations of low-income minorities in inner cities within which dysfunctional social behavior becomes contagious. Lacking middle-class adult role models,local places of employment, adequate public services or community institutions that support traditional values, these core areas become breeding grounds for social promiscuity, crime, violence, drug addiction and alcohol abuse" (Peterson, 1991:16).

The poorest poor of our urban centers, because of their social isolation, are bereft of the benefits of role models and institutional support found in more advantaged communities.

Residential segregation. Another factor argued to explain the increasing concentration of poverty in our central cities is residential segregation. Many researchers have identified the existence and persistence of racial residential segregation in American society, particularly within the older industrial cities in the Midwest and Northeast (e.g. Farley, 1991; Massey et al., 1990), and argue that it is this, rather than the flight of middle class blacks to the suburbs that accounts for the concentration of poverty in our inner cities. Farley (1991) concludes:

> "At least in the major metropolises, there is no evidence of increasing geographic segregation of economic groups. But it is reasonable to conclude that the average proportion of the impoverished population in the census tract of a typical poor black increased between 1970-1980. This came about because of the increases in the overall proportion of impoverished Northeast and Midwest metropolises rather than because of increases in residential segregation of poor blacks from prosperous blacks" (1991:275).

Racial discrimination. Massey (1990) argues that racial discrimination in the housing market, resulting in racial residential segregation, is a critical factor for explaining the creation of the urban underclass. According to Massey, the way that segregation concentrates poverty and creates disadvantaged minority neighborhoods provides a succinct explanation for why: 1) the urban underclass is so disproportionately

composed of African Americans and Puerto Ricans (African Americans and Puerto Ricans are the only groups in the U.S. experiencing both high levels of racial segregation and dramatic increases in poverty), and 2) why the urban underclass is confined primarily to the Northeast and Midwest and to specific cities. Massey argues that racial discrimination causes racial residential segregation:

> "...this high level of black segregation cannot be explained by black socioeconomic characteristics... it is linked empirically to the persistence of discrimination in housing markets and to continuing anti-black prejudice " (Massey, 1990:354).

The consequences of the concentration of poverty in urban areas are many. Exposure to the influence of peers engaged in gang-related and criminal activities, poor community infrastructure, crime, violence, and poor living conditions are magnified when the numbers of persons living below the poverty line are concentrated.

Racial Discrimination in Labor Market

Racial discrimination in the job market is another factor affecting the lives of minorities. Kirschenman and Neckerman (1991) studied employers in Chicago and found that both race and space play an important role for urban residents seeking employment. These researchers, found that employers had very negative impressions of inner city workers, considering them to be lacking in initiative, unskilled, and poorly equipped for work. Most employers had particularly negative perceptions of black men. For many of the respondents "black" and "inner city" were interchangeable, and both were considered undesirable employee traits. Their findings emphasize the importance of racial stereotypes for shaping employment opportunities for blacks living in the city.

The Link Between Structure and Family Behavior

What we established in the foregoing discussion is that cities have experienced dramatic shifts in the types of jobs which are available creating a "spatial mismatch" in terms of the suitability of jobs for urban residents, and that minorities face additional obstacles to employment due to racial discrimination. A number of social scientists have argued that these structural circumstances affect the choices people make about marriage and childbearing. William Julius Wilson is prominent among these scholars and has argued that the poor economic prospects that black males face in the inner city have affected the propensity for African American couples to marry.

A number of researchers have tried to test this claim directly, and most have found structural factors to be important for explaining private behavior. For example, Lichter and his colleagues (1992) examined women's transition to first marriage by race. Using a nationally-representative data set, they tested whether women's financial independence deterred marriage and whether the supply of economically self-sufficient men affected the likelihood of marrying for the first time among white and black women.

Lichter and his colleagues created three versions of a male "marriageable" pool index: the pool of employed men, the pool of men employed full-time, and the pool of men with adequate earnings defined as men who earned more than the poverty threshold for a family of four. Their models also included measures of family background. Their analyses revealed that although there are large racial differences in the availability of employed eligible men, such differences do not entirely explain racial differences in the timing of first marriage. However, marriage market factors account

for more of the racial differences than any other factors that were included in their models.

Other studies have also suggested that while there is a relationship between male unemployment rates and the prevalence of female-headed families, economic forces are not the entire explanation. For example, while Osterman (1991) found that Boston's strong economy had some impact on family formation during the 1980s -- while nationally single-parent families increased for all subgroups, their numbers in Boston declined for blacks and Hispanics -- the incidence of single-parent families during that period did not fall nearly as much as the unemployment rate or poverty rate. Osterman reasons that the driving force behind trends in single-parenthood, therefore, is not the economy. Osterman contends that the economy has altered the *consequences* of being a single parent.

Similarly, Mare and Winship (1991), studied the effects of labor market and education trends on marriage rates since 1940 and found that changes in employment of young black men explained about 20 percent of the decline in black marriage rates since 1960. But since earnings also increased substantially, which should have increased the rates of marriage, they conclude that there must be more to the explanation than socioeconomic factors. They argue that "labor market conditions are catalysts for changes in marriage and family formation, but a fuller understanding of marriage trends requires attention to the way family trends, once set in motion, continue by their own momentum" (Mare and Winship, 1991:195).

What is clear from these studies is that structural factors, such as employment opportunity and the concentration of povery, shape the context in which urban residents make choices related to marriage and childbearing. These factors only provide part of the explanation for the problems confronting our inner cities, however. In the next section we discuss the role of values of the society at large in shaping the family behavior of individuals.

Cultural Shifts

Many would argue that the patterns of family life and social problems that characterize urban areas are simply the reflection of social and cultural changes in American society at large. Scholars who study the family have argued that individualism has replaced moral and religious observance as the guiding principle of public and private behavior. Individual autonomy and personal freedom, according to these thinkers, have eroded the modern family; "family actors are essentially using individual, rather than group welfare as their basis for everyday action" (Schwartz, 1987). This trend toward individualism is assumed to be the basis of the high rates of divorce witnessed in recent decades (Gill, 1992), as well as increased crime, substance abuse, and other social maladies.

Since these arguments are often made on the basis of personal observations and often less than representative samples, social scientists have sought to document whether and to what extent there is empirical evidence to bolster the claim that there is a

growing trend toward individualism in recent decades. Norval Glenn, a sociologist, has amassed evidence from sample surveys to assess whether there has been a greater trend toward individualism. He used three indicators of individualism: a weakening in the allegiance Americans have to 1) political parties, 2) religion, and 3) the family (Glenn, 1987).

Using national survey data spanning 1952 to 1986, Glenn concludes that there has been an unmistakable decline in support for traditional political parties for more than 20 years. He concludes that party identification, which has implications for voter turn-out, has declined. Also, while there is less consensus about how to read the evidence, but Glenn believes that sample surveys on the religious beliefs and practices of individuals indicate a decline in traditional Christianity and a distinct decline in the percentage of adults who regard religion as important in their lives. Popenoe (1992) notes a decline in confidence in organized religion, as well as other societal institutions that bring cohesion and civic values to a society.

Glenn notes that there is also some lack of agreement as to whether there has been a decline in allegiance to the family. Sample surveys suggest an increase in acceptance of nontraditional, nonfamily roles for women, a decline in the stated ideal number of children for a family to have, and an increase in approval for premarital (Moore and Stief, 1991) and perhaps extramarital sexual relations (Glenn, 1987). Several researchers have found that substantial proportions of African American youth have a preferred age for their first birth that is younger than their preferred age to marry (Moore, Simms & Betsey, 1986). However, commentators differ in the conclusion

they draw from this evidence. There appears to be less allegiance to traditional family forms, yet the vast majority of youth prefer to marry and have children and define it to be very important. For example, data from *Monitoring the Future* (1988), a national study of 16,795 high school seniors in 1988 revealed:

- Seventy-eight percent of high school seniors consider themselves very likely to get married, 61 percent consider it very likely that they will have children, and 58 percent consider themselves very likely that they will stay married to the same person for life.

- Three fourths of survey participants rated having a good marriage and family life as "extremely important," while only 31 percent gave this same level of endorsement to "having lots of money."

- Being able to find steady work was considered extremely important by 73 percent of respondents.

- Being able to "give my children better opportunities than I've had" was given the strongest endorsement by 61 percent of respondents.

- While half of the respondents considered a man and women who live together without being married as "doing their own thing and not affecting anyone else," only 37 percent had this same feeling about a man and woman who decide to raise a child out of wedlock. Seventeen percent of the respondents considered this "living in a way that could be destructive to society."

Data from a national survey of 1,100 youth between the ages of 18-22 in 1987 also provide evidence of the value that young adults place on marriage (Moore and Stief, 1991).

- Three-fourths of black and nine-tenths of non-black youth feel a couple should not marry unless they are "prepared to stay together for life."

National surveys of adults reveal a similar endorsement for "family values."

- A telephone interview of 1200 adults in 1989 revealed that while 70 percent of respondents rated "respecting one's parents" as describing "family values" very

well, only 54 percent rated "being married to the same person for life" the same way.

- A Gallup poll telephone interview in 1991 revealed that 93 percent of respondents rated their family life as "very important." Sixty percent of survey participants in a Newsweek sponsored telephone interview in 1987, considered this goal more important now than it was five years ago.

- A survey of 1000 adults sponsored by Parents Magazine in 1989 found that 78 percent endorsed a "return to traditional values and old-fashioned morality."

- A Roper poll of 2002 persons in 1985 revealed that 58 percent of the adults interviewed felt that " a return to the strong family unit" would do the most to make society better. An equal proportion, 54 percent, chose "more and better education" and "new developments in health and medical care."

Survey data also reveal paradoxes, however. For example, respondents respond favorably regarding their own families but are pessimistic about the state of American families as a whole (National Commission on Children, 1991). Thus, policy-makers must sort out whether the trend toward increasing "individualism" is a cause or merely a consequence of the family changes of recent decades. This distinction is important for policy because, to the extent that family change is adaptive and has occurred due to changed economic circumstances, economic policy may be effective in shaping family goals. But to the extent that values exert influence independently of economic forces, a different policy stance -- one aimed ar directly changing or strengthening values -- would be appropriate (Glenn, 1991). Of course, even if attitudes change as a function of economic forces, those new attitudes can then affect behavior and can thus also affect the socialization of the next generation. Attitudes change, as do values; but values change more slowly than attitudes. Once attitudes and values change, they have a momentum of their own which must be acknowledged. Most likely, cultural shifts are

both cause *and* effect. They are caused by forces such as economic and technological change, but then in turn have an effect of their own.

Synthesis

The co-existence of stresses and problems in urban areas, particularly in the central cities, has made the causes of urban problems difficult to identify and made finding solutions to urban problems a tremendous challenge. Commentators have offered a variety of perspectives, the most prominent of which emphasize the roles of family behavior, structural forces, and cultural values. Because of the inter-connectedness of these factors, public policies designed to address urban problems need to include elements of all three.

The underlying assumption of the family behavior argument is that encouraging changes in family behavior (such as delaying childbearing and encouraging entry into marital unions) will have broad-reaching benefits at both the individual and societal levels. Before acting on this assumption, however, it is important to understand why the connection between family structure and positive outcomes exists. Researchers have provided mounting evidence of some causal influence through income, stress, and parental supervision. There is also reason to believe that family structure does not fully explain positive outcomes. The selection of disadvantaged persons and families into single parenthood helps to account for the poorer outcomes of persons in single-parent families. In addition, factors such as inadequate neighborhood safety and delinquent

peer groups provide challenges disproportionately to low-income, single-parent families who live in central city communities. Such challenges would overwhelm many successful two-parent families if they were forced to raise children in such environments.

Thus, while certainly part of the explanation, family behavior does not by itself explain the poverty and other difficulties facing urban families. The case of Hispanics, whose poverty rates have increased despite their allegiance to traditional family patterns, provides striking evidence that other forces are at work.

The structural change perspective emphasizes the point that the choices that individuals make about marriage and childbearing do not occur in a vacuum, but are shaped by the environments in which they live. The opportunity structure of urban communities helps to shape family behavior. Thus, one strategy for influencing family patterns is to increase economic opportunities. However, it is too simplistic to treat apparently dysfunctional behavior as simply the response to a lack of jobs, assuming it will change with improving job prospects. Causality cannot be assumed to be uni-directional such that most individuals will react automatically to economic change. Again, this perspective provides part of the explanation, although not all, and part of the solution, but not all.

Finally, it is insufficient to merely focus on the values of inner-city sidents. Values related to marriage and family life have shifted nationwide. Increased proportions of single-parent families and non-marital births are found throughout the nation, but the proportions have become higher and the consequences more severe for central cities of the nation. Because of this, it will be ineffective for the educated and

economically elite to lecture inner city residents about changing their behavior. Moreover, producing cultural change that would reinstate values that have been undermined or abandoned is extremely difficult, especially if values have changed independently of economic forces. This is not meant to suggest that strengthening families is hopeless, however.

Leaders, especially community leaders who have the trust of constituents, congregations, and citizens can affect attitudes and values. Also, social institutions, such as schools, day care centers, and churches can be mechanisms for supporting the family. For example, smaller schools and classroom sizes may provide the increased level of attention and supervision that youngsters need in order to thrive. In addition, parents can be educated about the consequences of their decisions for their children and young people need to understand the responsibilities of parenthood. Disadvantaged youth should be provided with alternatives so that they do not enter into parenthood too soon. In addition, from evidence presented in the foregoing section it is also clear that adequate jobs, good schools, safety, and community services are important to the quality of life, and consequently, to the family behavior of central city residents.

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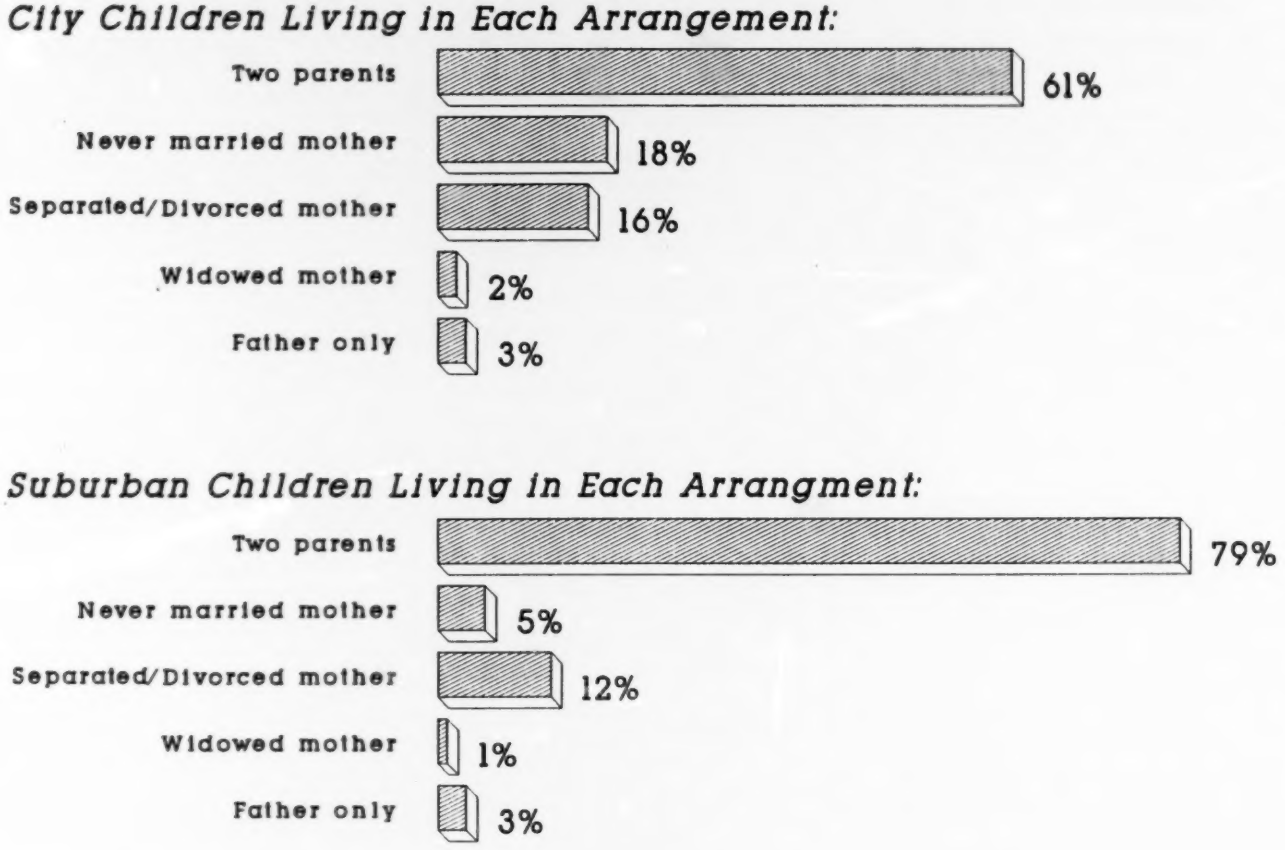
Figure 1

Family Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 in Large Metropolitan Areas* by Residence in City or Suburb



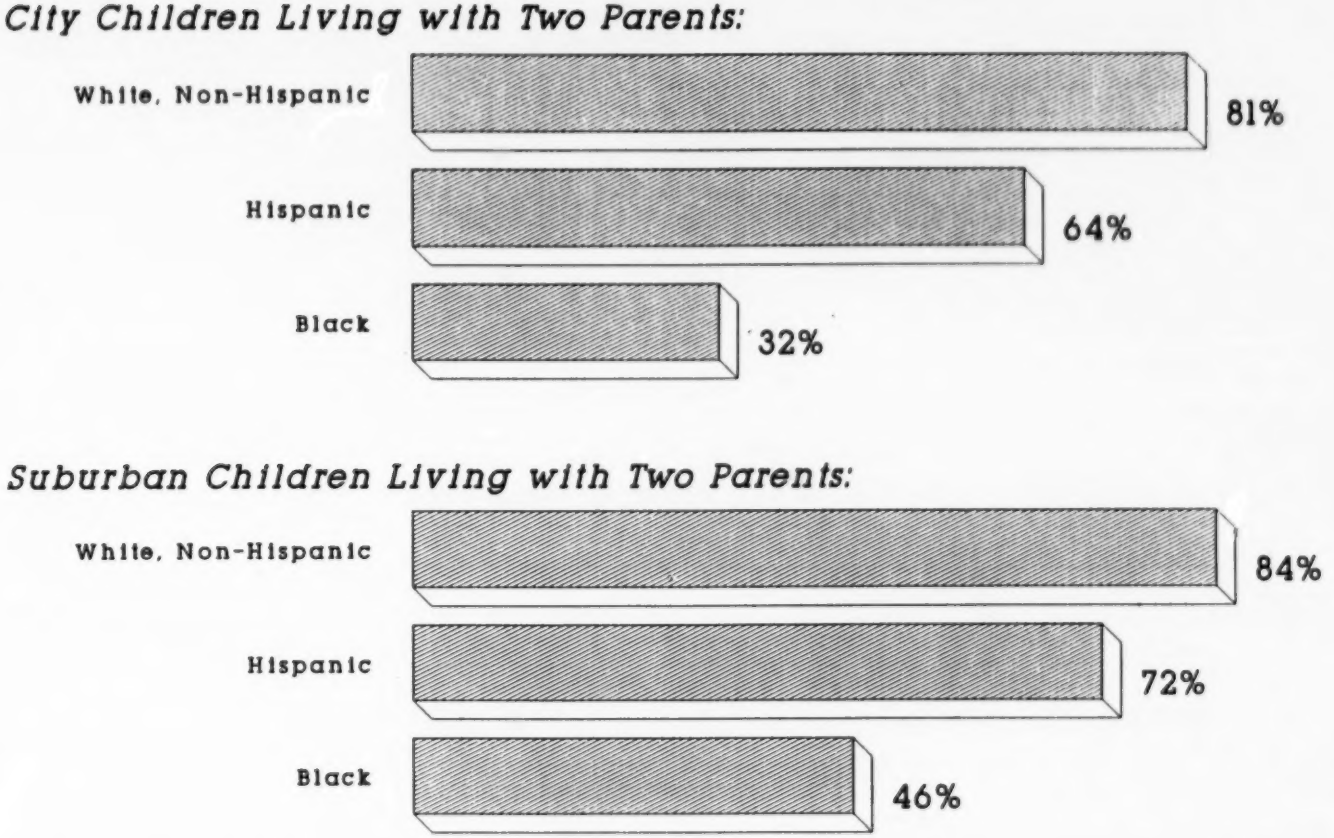
*Those with populations of one million or more.

Note: Percentages are based only on children living with at least one parent.

Source: Tabulations by Child Trends, Inc., from data from Arlene F. Saluter, *Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1991*, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 461, GPO, Washington, DC, 1992.

Figure 2

Proportion of Children Under 18 in Large Metropolitan Areas* Living with Two Parents, by Race/Hispanic Origin and Residence in City or Suburb



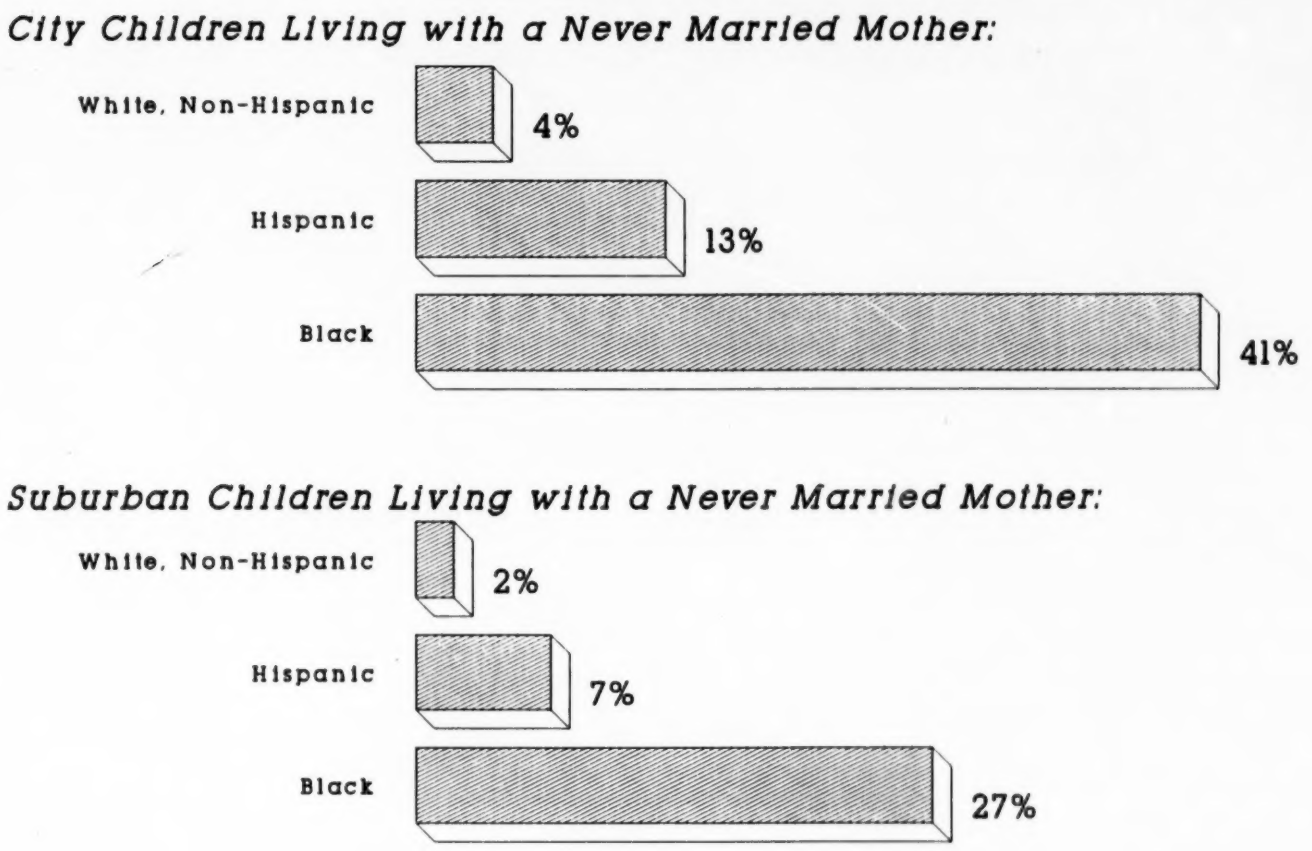
*Those with populations of one million or more.

Note: Percentages are based only on children living with at least one parent.

Source: Tabulations by Child Trends, Inc., from data from Arlene F. Saluter, *Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1991*, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 461, GPO, Washington, DC, 1992.

Figure 3

Proportion of Children Under 18 in Large Metropolitan Areas* Living with a Never Married Mother, by Race/Hispanic Origin and Residence in City or Suburb



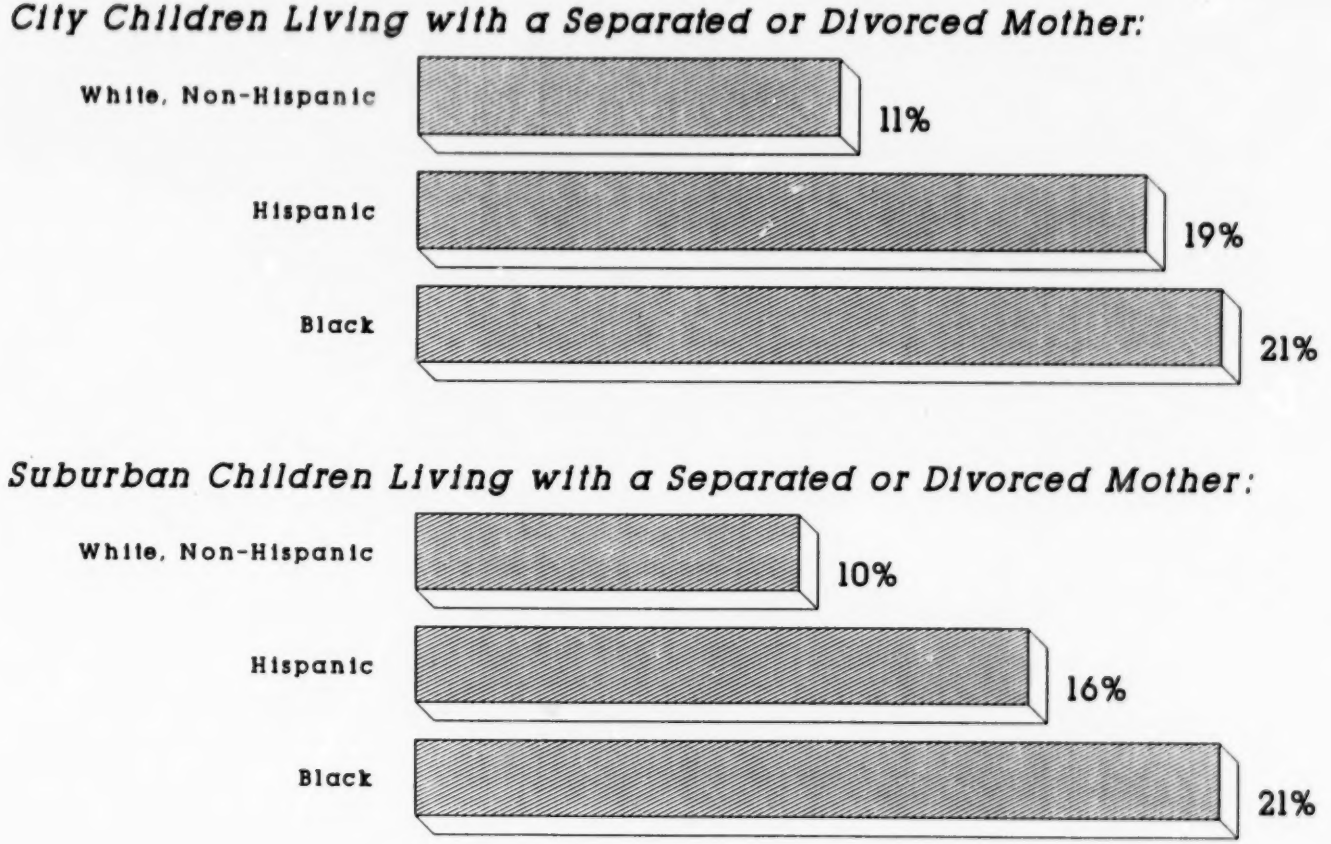
*Those with populations of one million or more.

Note: Percentages are based only on children living with at least one parent.

Source: Tabulations by Child Trends, Inc., from data from Arlene F. Saluter, *Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1991*, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 461, GPO, Washington, DC, 1992.

Figure 4

Proportion of Children Under 18 in Large Metropolitan Areas* Living with a Separated or Divorced Mother, by Race/Hispanic Origin and Residence in City or Suburb

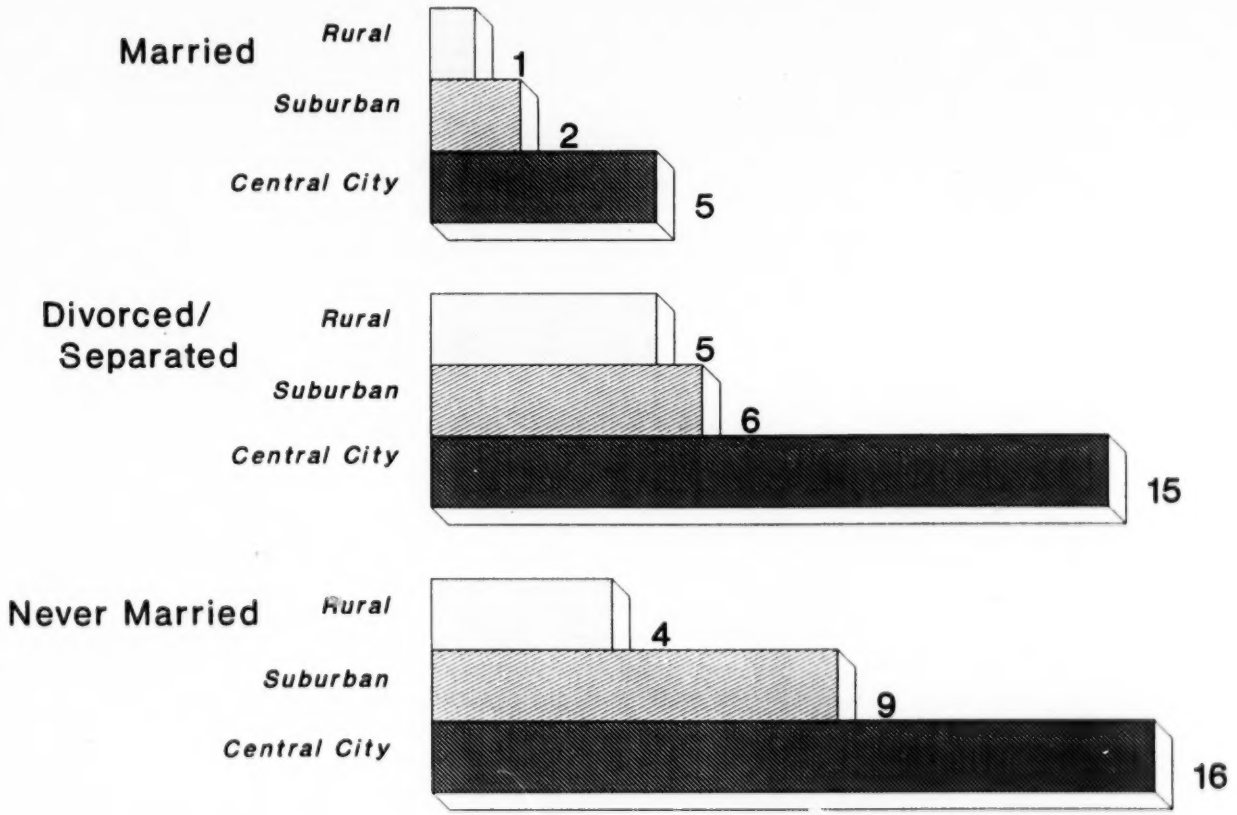


*Those with populations of one million or more.

Note: Percentages are based only on children living with at least one parent.

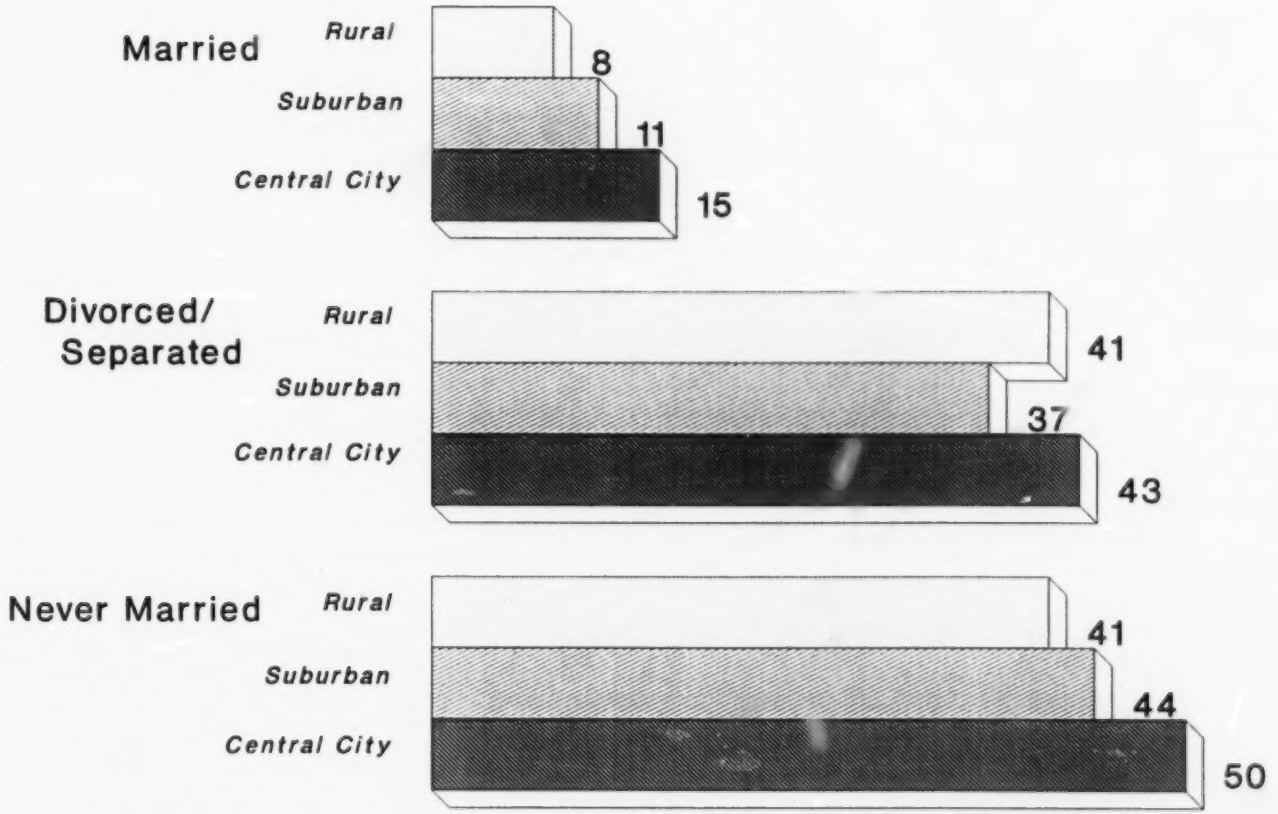
Source: Tabulations by Child Trends, Inc., from data from Arlene F. Saluter, *Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1991*, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 461, GPO, Washington, DC, 1992.

Variation in Crime Victimization by Marital Status & Urban Residence
Robbery Rates per 1,000 Persons, 1987-89



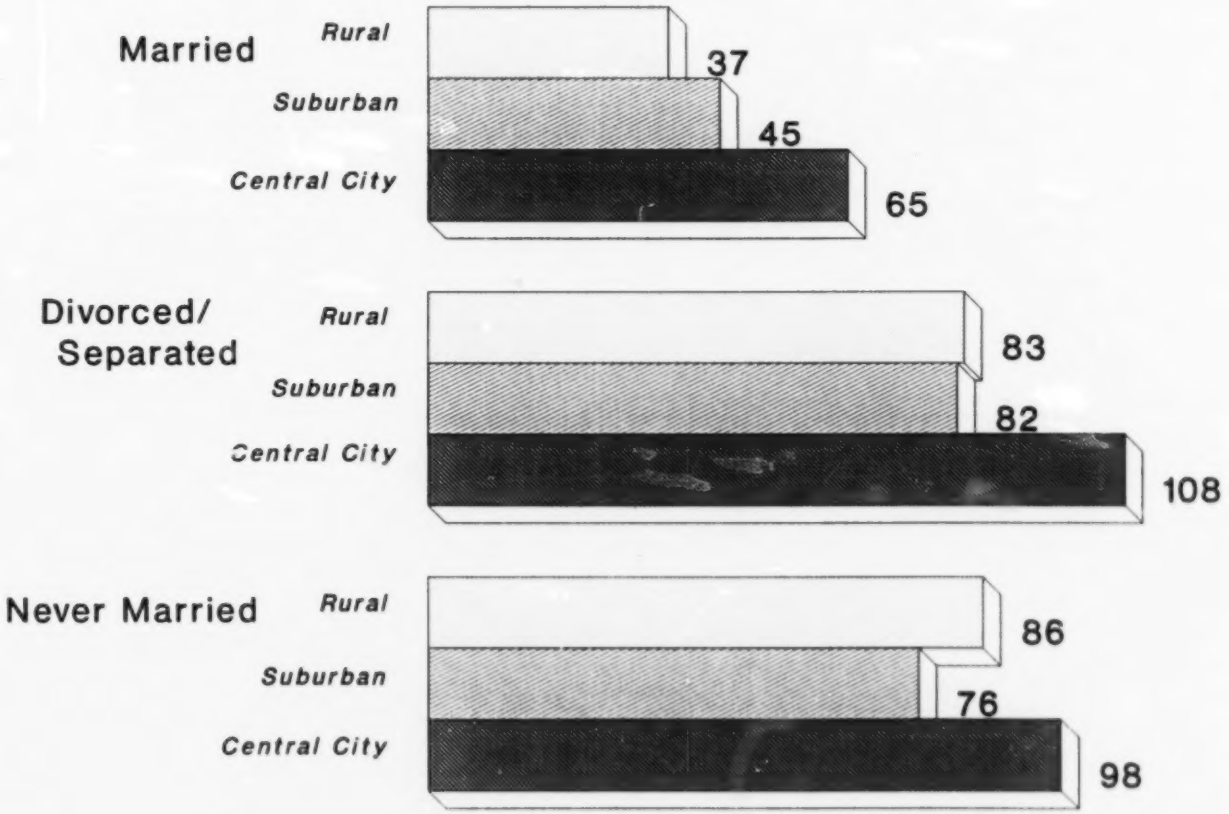
Source: Nicholas Zill and Margaret Daly, Child Trends, Inc., based on data in Bureau of Justice Statistics report #NCJ-135943, 1992.

Variation in Crime Victimization by Marital Status & Urban Residence
Assault Rates per 1,000 Persons, 1987-89



Source: Nicholas Zill and Margaret Daly, Child Trends, Inc., based on data in Bureau of Justice Statistics report #NCJ-135943, 1992.

Variation in Crime Victimization by Marital Status & Urban Residence
Burglary Rates per 1,000 Households, 1987-89



Source: Nicholas Zill and Margaret Daly, Child Trends, Inc., based on data in Bureau of Justice Statistics report #NCJ-135943, 1992.